

Appendix 1:
A Restated Opinion on
the Origin of the 1804 Dollar
and the 1804 Eagle Proofs

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Another updated explanation of the situation giving rise to the U.S. Mint creation of the proof dollar dated 1804, the proof Eagle dated 1804 and related coinage may be surplusage. Nevertheless at this time newly refined and hopefully clarified conclusions may be welcome. It is assumed that the reader has already studied the matter, including reading *The Fantastic 1804 Dollar* published in 1962 and much of the continuing commentary on the subject since then.¹



A (enlarged). Silver 50 cents showing device designs in current use in 1834 for it and lower denominations, having a capped bust design facing left on the obverse and only 3 arrows in the eagle's claw on the reverse.

1. On November 11, 1834, President Jackson directed that a complete set of the coins of the United States be prepared by the U.S. Mint for presentation to certain foreign rulers and specified "each kind now in use." Another order for additional dignitaries soon followed. For presentation purposes proof coins were deemed desirable.

2. It was thought by the Mint officials that to make a better impression on the foreign dignitaries the largest coins which the U.S. had minted should be included in the sets, even though the largest coins (the silver dollar and the gold Eagle) had not been minted for about 30 years and were not "in use" (in circulation) in 1834. To locate choice examples of previously issued early dollars and Eagles was apparently not considered satisfactory or practical for the purpose.



B (enlarged). Gold 1834 \$5 showing device designs in use before June 24, 1834, on gold coinage, with obverse having a capped bust design facing left and reverse having the design of an eagle below a motto and holding 3 arrows.



C (enlarged). Gold 1834 \$5 showing device designs in use after June 24, 1834, on gold coinage, with obverse having a classic bust design facing left and reverse having the eagle design without motto and holding 3 arrows.

3. There was a major problem in late 1834 if the Mint determined to include a silver dollar and a gold Eagle in each presentation set. The punches and dies for lower silver and gold denominations for the year 1834 had been prepared earlier in the year and before the presentation set matter arose (see figs. A, B, and C). Since no silver dollars or gold Eagles had been minted for 30 years no new device punches or dies had been prepared for those denominations during that long interval. A substantial amount of work and time would be required for the Mint to engrave new obverse and new reverse device punches for both a silver dollar and a gold Eagle to match current designs on the lower denomination coinage. Dies could be made more quickly and with less work than device punches, but device punches had to be available for dies to be made. Since device punches over 30 years old with obsolete designs happened to be available in 1834, the thought arose that the preparation of new device punches with properly matching designs might be avoided in preparing dies for the silver dollars and gold Eagles for presentation sets, as many of the obsolete ornament, letter and numeral punches had also been retained. The use of the available obsolete device punches to make dies for silver dollars and gold Eagles would save extensive work and time but would result in those coins not matching the designs on the current 1834 coins prepared for the presentation sets. A problem was what date might be cut into those dies. If those two denominations were to be prepared with obsolete designs and dated 1834 a major criticism from American officials and others would obviously have been justified for the creation of previously non-existent coins which did not match the current designs. Was there a proper way to save the work and time to make new device punches and to create a silver dollar as the largest silver coin and the Eagle as the largest gold coin for the few presentation sets needed?

4. The officially published annual U.S. Mint Reports for 1804 and 1805 stated that dollars were "made" by the Mint in the years 1804 and 1805. The handwritten detailed records indicate that these pieces consisted of Spanish-American dollars of various dates and U.S. dollars dated earlier than the year 1804. No U.S. dollar coinage of any kind occurred in 1805. The coinage of silver dollars was banned by order of President Jefferson on May 1, 1806.

5. Because of such officially published statistics, some Mint officials in 1834 had reason to believe that U.S. dollars dated 1804 might have been minted in 1804 and 1805, but found none in the Eckfeldt



D (enlarged). Gold Eagle dated 1804 struck in 1804 with dies prepared in 1804 from punches then in current usage. Obverse design with a capped bust facing right and reverse design with an heraldic eagle holding 13 arrows. Date with crosslet on 4. No Eagles coined after 1804 until diplomatic problem in 1834.

collection at the Mint. Such a belief, although erroneous, was apparently still held in 1842 when Eckfeldt and Du Bois published *A Manual of Gold and Silver Coins* and illustrated the type of U.S. dollar for the "1797-1805" period as having an 1804 date.² That period was obviously derived from the officially published Mint Reports rather than the handwritten detailed records. The authors knew however that their book illustration was of an 1804 dollar coined by the U.S. Mint in 1834 from dies cut in 1834. The use of the illustration was an effort to help justify and cover up what the Mint had done in 1834.

6. The officially published annual U. S. Mint Reports for 1804 and 1805 accurately stated that gold Eagles were "made" by the Mint in 1804 and none in 1805 (fig. D). The Eckfeldt collection had retained an example of an Eagle dated 1804 since its coinage in 1804. Feeling they needed proof coins for presentation, the Mint determined to use available obsolete punches to make a pair of new dies in 1834 for an Eagle dated 1804 and strike coins with them.

7. All denominations of U.S. gold and silver coins minted prior to 1828 had a circle of dentils around the border of both obverse and reverse extending radially to the circumferential edge. In 1828 the border design of dimes was modified to a circle of beading within and touching a thin flat raised band along the circumference. This same change of design was applied to half dimes in 1829 and to reduced diameter quarters in 1831. The modified border first appeared on production coinage of half dollars late in 1836, but is also found on both faces of experimental proof half dollars dated 1833, 1834 and 1835 (see above, fig. A). The modified border design is found on the dollars dated 1804 and on the proof dollars dated 1801, 1802 and 1803 which are die-linked through the reverse die to the Class I dollars dated 1804. The modified border design was adopted for production coinage for each denomination to coordinate with the further development of a one-piece collar die (the close or closed collar) to use in striking those coins. A one-piece collar die for dollars was not available for use in production coinage until steam powered presses were introduced at the U.S. Mint in 1836 for Gobrecht dollars which also have the modified border.

8. The Class I dollars dated 1804 were individually struck during 1834 for presentation sets on the U.S. Mint's available medal press using a smooth collar die from which the coin was not extracted automatically (fig. E). During striking the smooth collar crushed the



E. Silver dollar dated 1804 struck in 1834 from dies prepared in late 1834 from retained obsolete punches with device designs having a draped bust facing right with uncovered hair on the obverse and an heraldic eagle holding 13 arrows on the reverse. No dollars had been coined for 30 years prior thereto.

edge lettering which had been put on the planchet by the available Castaing machine and old edge lettering dies. Class II and Class III dollars dated 1804 and the proof dollars dated 1801, 1802 and 1803 were not prepared in 1834 and were struck many years later.

9. The May 1, 1806 presidential ban on coinage of U.S. dollars was officially terminated on April 18, 1831, because of the stabilization of the silver to gold value ratio, but no silver dollar coinage, no silver dollar pattern and no silver dollar device punch resulted and none were then planned. Franklin Peale went to Europe in 1833 to study new minting techniques.

10. If either new device punches or new dies cut with such new punches had been prepared for dollar production in 1831 they would have borne capped bust designs facing left similar to those on the then current subsidiary silver coinage or entirely new designs, rather than a retrogression to the long abandoned draped bust facing right design and the heraldic eagle design used for dollars and other subsidiary silver coins during the period just prior to 1804.

11. Even though there was no specific restriction against coinage of the dollar and Eagle denominations in 1834 it might have been contrary to authority or protocol (as well as the November 11, 1834 instructions) to coin denominations not currently minted.

12. The Mint officials were constantly aware that under the law coins were to be dated with the year in which they were struck. In attempted compliance with that rule in the past the Mint had created

ugly overdating, but there were often minor technical violations of the law when carryover dies from the preceding year (occasionally two or three years) were used because they were still in satisfactory condition and it was economically sound to use them until they wore out or broke. The minting in 1834 of a coin dated 1804 from newly prepared dies was clearly contrary to law and not within the foregoing accepted conservation practice.

13. The idea of antedating the dies for the dollar and the Eagle to a year in which the Mint officials speculated or knew such coinage had been minted was selected as a way of handling the diplomatic gift matter with only a modest amount of impropriety or illegality.

14. Mint officials believed that no one (particularly foreign rulers) would know the difference between a dollar made in 1834 but dated 1804 and a dollar coined in and dated 1804, but if that fact was learned it was believed that no one would be concerned. This thinking would also have applied to any dollars dated prior to 1804 which might be minted in 1834 with newly prepared dies.

15. Mint officials therefore considered the possibility of using such dates as 1801, 1802 or 1803 for dollars to be coined in 1834 for the presentation sets as they positively knew that there were coins of such dates in the Eckfeldt collection but were not certain whether there was or was not a dollar coined in 1804 with an 1804 date.

16. Mint officials also believed that no one (particularly foreign rulers) would know the difference between an Eagle made in 1834 but dated 1804 and an Eagle coined in 1804 and dated 1804, but if that fact was learned it was believed that no one would be concerned. Similarly if an Eagle dated 1804 coined in late 1834 contained the larger gold content effective in 1804 rather than the reduced standard effective under the June 28, 1834 Act, this would be helpful to the deception. Available obsolete device and other punches were used in 1834 to create Eagle dies with the obverse die dated 1804 and that pair of dies was used to strike Eagles with the gold content effective in 1804 rather than the gold content required in late 1834. The Eagle obverse die which was cut in 1834 had no crosslet on the 4 of the date and otherwise differed slightly from the Eagle obverse die used in 1804 for striking Eagles dated 1804, all of which had a crosslet on the 4 of the date. The new heraldic eagle reverse die used for the \$10 Eagle struck in 1834 differs from all other known heraldic eagle reverse dies of \$10 Eagles of any date

and also from all other heraldic eagle reverse dies used at any time for silver half dollars (the heraldic eagle reverse dies on these silver half dollars being the same size and style as those dies used for the gold Eagles). The border beading on the obverse and reverse dies of the Eagles dated 1804 and struck in 1834 differed from the dentils on the borders of the Eagles dated 1804 and struck in 1804. The raised reeds on the edge of the Eagles struck in 1834 were narrower and greater in number than the raised reeds on the edge of the Eagles struck in 1804. Thus the making and use of new dies in late 1834 to strike Eagles dated 1804 with an improper weight and an improper date created Eagle novodels and illegal Eagles (fig. F).

17. In view of the uncertainty of Mint officials in 1834 as to whether dollars dated 1804 had or had not been struck in 1804 and to avoid possible criticism on that account it seemed practical to have alternate dates to choose from and obverse dies dated 1801, 1802 and 1803 were made up at the same time as the new obverse die dated 1804 was cut. When cutting these four obverse dollar dies with the old bust punch (probably brittle from prior use) a curl on the top of the head of that device punch broke off after it was used on the first two pieces of die stock. This went unnoticed. In preparing the four obverse dies the four selected dates were punched in randomly. Each die thus had an equal chance of having either a complete curl or a broken curl. It so happened that the die dated 1804 had a broken curl as did the die dated 1801. The dies dated 1802 and 1803 each had an unbroken curl.

18. Because four differently dated obverse dies happened to be prepared for coining the dollar for the presentation sets there were several obverse dies available for substitution in case of obverse die breakage. Only two reverse dies were prepared because either could be paired with any obverse die and one spare reverse die was adequate for possible substitution. This situation might explain why more obverse dies than reverse dies were prepared which was not a customary practice for production coinage.

19. The fact that in 1834 the star punches used on the obverse dollar die dated 1801 and the figure punches for that die were of a different style than those used at the same time for obverse dollar dies dated 1802, 1803 and 1804 was coincidental as sets of various sizes of all these styles of punches were available in 1834 at the Mint because of prior use of those styles on other denominations of U.S. Mint coinage.



F (enlarged). Gold Eagle dated 1804 struck in 1834 with dies prepared in late 1834 from retained obsolete device punches. Obverse design with a capped bust facing right and reverse design with an heraldic eagle holding 13 arrows. Date with no crosslet on 4.

20. It was deemed that only one new pair of dies was needed for the Eagle dated 1804 because striking a few gold coin examples in the medal press would not result in die breakage, particularly because gold was softer than silver and the Eagle was thin. Because it was then known that Eagles dated 1804 had been coined in 1804 no other substitute dates were needed for making Eagles for the presentation sets.
21. The obverse dollar die dated 1804 and the reverse die (designated variety X) were selected for use in minting the dollars for the diplomatic coin sets and the extra examples. The Mint officials in 1834 therefore created an unknown dollar dated 1804 hoping or thinking that they had reproduced a previously existing coin. The dollar dated 1804 thus created was a novodel dollar and an illegal dollar.
22. The remaining 1801, 1802 and 1803 obverse dollar dies and the remaining reverse die (designated variety Y) were not needed or used for the preparation of the diplomatic coin sets and were (along with the dies which were used for that diplomatic purpose) available for devilment and connivance thereafter. From these dies novodel dollars dated 1801, 1802 and 1803 were made in later years as well as dollars dated 1804 known as Class II and Class III 1804 dollars. The word "restrike" is improperly applied to the novodel dollars dated 1801, 1802 and 1803 as there are no known prior strikes using any of their obverse dies. Their reverse die however had been used in 1834 for the Class I 1804 novodel dollars.
23. In the exchange with Matthew A. Stickney on May 9, 1843, the Mint traded a dollar dated 1804 for a 1785 Immune Columbia gold piece. Both parties received coins not struck at the time of their dating and each probably thought he was fooling the other.
24. The affidavits and letters of Mint officials inferring or stating that the dollars dated 1804 were coined in 1804 were a deliberate attempt to cover up their mistakes and improper acts undertaken at the Mint in 1834 or early 1835 when the coins dated 1804 for the presentation sets were being prepared.
25. The experimental proof half dollars dated 1833, 1834 and 1835 (previously referred to in section 7), in addition to having beading inside a raised thin flat border band on both faces: (I) have planchets which were edge lettered before striking; (II) have edge let-

tering which was crushed when struck in the U.S. Mint medal press; and (III) have the identical reverse die which was used in 1836 for edge lettered half dollar production coinage in combination with a new obverse die dated 1836 having dentils extending radially to the circumference, such combination being known as Overton variety 106.³ Whether the 1833, 1834 and 1835 experimental proof half dollars were struck during the year of their dating or at some time prior to the transfer in 1836 of the reverse die to production coinage (when reverse die breaks occurred) does not seem certain. Thus the dies made for and the striking of such experimental proof half dollars may have taken place during late 1834 and thereafter. The above described 1836 half dollar variety appears to be the only United States coin which has a border with dentils extending radially to the circumference on one face and beading inside a raised thin flat border band on the other face.

Virtually all of the foregoing is based upon presently undisputed facts. Some is based upon what the writer considers ordinary and obvious human attitudes and thinking. Each reader is naturally free to retain, develop or change his own opinion on any of the foregoing points wherever new specific historical or scientific data may arise or the thoughts expressed herein do not meet with the reader's satisfaction.

For over 33 years Kenneth E. Bressett and I have continually shared our findings and thoughts on this intriguing subject and he has contributed to the foregoing position paper and agrees with it. The cooperation of the American Numismatic Society, the Harry W. Bass, Jr. Research Foundation, Q. David Bowers and Thomas Serfass is also much appreciated.

¹ Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett, *The Fantastic 1804 Dollar* (Racine, WI, 1962). A recent summary of the literature appears in Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett, "The Fantastic 1804 Dollar: 25th Anniversary Follow-up," *America's Silver Coinage, 1794-1891*, COAC Proceedings 3 (New York, 1987), pp. 153-75.

² Jacob R. Eckfeldt and William E. Du Bois, *A Manual of Gold and Silver Coins* (Philadelphia, 1842)

³ A.C. Overton, *Early Half Dollar Die Varieties, 1794-1836* (Colorado Springs, CO, 1967).